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**Centre of  
expertise  
on child  
sexual abuse**



Child sexual exploitation perpetrators  
research programme, report 1

# **Young people who engage in child sexual exploitation behaviours**

## **An exploratory study**

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**February 2018**

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## About the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse has been established to help bring about significant and system-wide change in how child sexual abuse is responded to locally and nationally.

We do this by identifying, generating and sharing high-quality evidence of what works to prevent and tackle child sexual abuse (including child sexual exploitation), to inform both policy and practice.

The Centre is funded by the Home Office and led by Barnardo's, and works closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector.

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# Summary

Despite increasing awareness of child sexual exploitation (CSE) across the UK in recent years, there remain gaps in current knowledge and understanding – including in relation to young people who perpetrate acts of CSE. In contrast to the wider research base for harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) in childhood and adolescence, which has developed significantly in recent years, there is little in the literature specifically on the topic of young people who engage in sexually exploitative behaviours.

This report describes one of three research projects commissioned by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse to build an evidence base about perpetrators of CSE. The project aimed to investigate:

- the backgrounds of young people identified for CSE concerns as perpetrators
- the nature and range of their sexual behaviours
- the range of victims targeted
- other offending behaviours displayed by the young people.

## Method

Anonymised data was obtained from electronic records held by a police-led, multiagency initiative which focuses on CSE and on missing children. Consisting of 14 cases, the data are a convenience and non-probability sample which represent a significant minority of the cases becoming known to this 'CSE team' over a 24-month period where an alleged perpetrator was under the age of 18 at the point of their harmful or exploitative sexual behaviours.

This study therefore drew only on existing secondary data already available to the CSE team; it was beyond the study's scope to conduct interviews with professionals involved in the cases, or with the young people and their families directly. The electronic records contained considerable and detailed information compiled by a wide range of agencies over a substantial period of time.

## Key findings

Because of the small sample size and the reliance on official case records which may be partial and limited, the following findings should be regarded as at best indicative.

- All young people in the sample were **male** and **white British**.
- Their current **age** ranged between 14 and 21 years old, with the overwhelming majority aged over 16; this is an older sample than many reported in the literature on HSB. Their age at the point when concerning sexual behaviours first emerged ranged from 7 to 18 years old; in contrast to other demographic studies of young people with HSB, which have indicated substantial early-onset trajectories, only one case indicated a pattern of pre-adolescent sexual behaviour problems.
- **Experiences of adversity** were found in the developmental histories of 10 of the 14 young people. The most commonly reported factor was domestic violence, followed by physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Previous studies of young people with HSB have reported higher rates of previous victimisation.
- Twelve of the young people had long-standing **non-sexual offending histories**: theft, burglary, criminal damage and general antisocial behaviours were extensive and pervasive. All the young people appear to fit the 'generalist' category of HSB offender, whose sexual offending appears to be more directed towards peers as part of a broader catalogue of deviance and non-sexual offending trajectories.
- A model proposed by Ward and Siegert (2002) describes five primary **developmental pathways** leading into sexually abusive behaviours. Many of the young people in the sample appear to fit into the *antisocial thinking* pathway,

where an underlying propensity towards general deviance and antisocial behaviour becomes sexualised during puberty.

- ▶ In all cases, the concerns about young people's sexual behaviours related to a young person offending **alone** or to **pairs** of young people whose behaviours appeared interlinked and inter-influenced. There were no 'gang-related' or larger group incidents of HSB or CSE.
- ▶ Whilst all 14 young people had targeted **female victims**, only one was known to have sexually offended against a male (in addition to multiple female victims). HSB towards teenage peers was preceded in only three cases by sexual abuse of **pre-pubescent children**. Previous research into young people's HSB has identified significant proportions of male victims and victims aged 10 or below.
- ▶ The young people were typically involved in **multiple and in some cases escalating harmful sexual behaviours**: nine engaged in exploitative or harmful sexual behaviours online or using social media, accompanied in most cases by contact sexual exploitation or sexual abuse. There was not strong evidence of a clear progression from online to offline HSB: it was just as likely for offline HSB to precede online behaviours.

significant implications for both intervention approaches and prevention activities.

However, it was difficult to separate the young people's behaviours meaningfully and neatly into categories of CSE and HSB. Whilst all cases fitted widely used definitions of HSB, the extent to which they are accompanied by overt elements of exchange (as would fit the definition of CSE) was much less clear in many cases. The sexual behaviours of all the young people in the sample required disruption, management and intervention – but it is unclear whether that should be undertaken by a CSE team or an HSB team. This perhaps reflects the present inadequacy of using distinct sets of language and concepts (CSE and HSB) and service frameworks to respond to the problem of transgressive sexual behaviour in adolescence.

## Implications and recommendations

The impression gained from this pilot study is of young people who engage in CSE behaviours as a generally very deviant group whose sexual and non-sexual behaviours are disinhibited, chaotic and non-boundaried. The small scale of this study, and the use of data from one team with a particular focus and operating model, limits the conclusions that can be drawn; nevertheless, the study's tentative findings should be investigated in more detail.

In some of the cases examined, it was possible to see a progression from sexual assaults or sexually abusive behaviour without overt elements of exchange towards more 'CSE-type' behaviours over time. It may be that CSE-type behaviours in adolescence, much more so than more general HSB, are more strongly related to general deviance than a history of sexual victimisation; if so, this has



It was difficult to separate the young people's behaviours meaningfully and neatly into categories of CSE and HSB.



# 1. Introduction

Following a series of high-profile cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE) across the UK in recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the problem, with a significant amount of attention given over to better interagency responses. For example, the UK Government's action plan on CSE set out the actions needed to help prevent CSE from occurring, disrupt the activities of offenders and assist those who are victimised. Soon after the publication of this action plan, there was evidence of local safeguarding children boards and local authorities acknowledging the existence of CSE in their areas and establishing dedicated services and 'CSE teams' in response (DfE, 2012).

The establishment of the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, which has the issue of CSE as a core focus, is an indication of the extent to which CSE has become an integral part of the overall landscape of policy and practice responses to the broader issue of sexual abuse of children and adults in contemporary UK society.

Although considerable ground has been covered in developing awareness of CSE, there remain a number of shortcomings and gaps in current knowledge and understanding; one notable gap relates to young people who perpetrate acts of CSE. Although the research base for harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) in childhood and adolescence has developed significantly in recent years (see Hackett, 2014), there is little in the literature specifically on the topic of adolescent CSE behaviours. An exception is the work of Firmin (2015) on peer sexual abuse, which has highlighted the significance of sexual assault and exploitative sexual behaviour in group contexts. However, there remains a general lack of research into CSE perpetration in young people.

In early 2017, the Centre of expertise commissioned three research projects to build an evidence base about perpetrators of CSE, through a rapid evidence assessment, exploratory empirical research with adult perpetrators of CSE, and the exploratory study described in this report.

## 1.1. Aim

The aim of the study was to explore the issue of adolescent CSE perpetration by examining a sample of cases which have come to the attention of one CSE team. Specific attention was given to:

- what is known about the backgrounds of the young people identified for CSE concerns as perpetrators
- the nature and range of their sexual behaviours and their fit with the definitions of HSB and CSE
- the range of victims targeted
- other offending behaviours displayed by the young people.

This pilot report offers indicative data from 14 case examples involving young people engaged in behaviours that had brought them to the attention of the CSE team. Attention is given to the nature of the behaviours, their victims, and what is known about the young people who had perpetrated them. There is an initial attempt to link the findings to existing theory and models about the pathways taken by individuals into sexual offending, as well as speculating on how CSE behaviours in youth may fit into models of subtypes of adolescent HSB.

## 1.2. The context

The dominant image of CSE to date, as reflected in the rapid evidence assessment commissioned and undertaken in parallel to this study (Walker et al, 2018), is of adult men exploiting vulnerable teenage young women. However, the learning from CSE teams throughout the UK is that the picture relating to CSE offenders is much more mixed. For example, the data for the current study were collected from a police-led multiagency CSE initiative in the North East of England which has identified that, over its two years of operations so far, young people account for more than 60% of individuals about whom there are CSE concerns as perpetrators.



Despite this, there has been little research, and little written to date, about young people presenting with exploitative sexual behaviours towards children, or about the similarities and differences between young people engaging in such behaviours and adult CSE offenders.

There are also some definitional and conceptual challenges posed by the existence of young people as 'CSE offenders'. Attention to CSE as an important issue has led to some confusion between general sexual offending and CSE offending as a subcategory. In relation to adolescents, the term 'harmful sexual behaviour' has become widely adopted as an umbrella term to describe children and young people's sexual behaviours that are harmful to others; some of these are dealt with by the criminal justice system, but others do not lead to criminal justice outcomes. The NSPCC operational framework defines harmful sexual behaviours as:

'Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult.'

(Hackett et al, 2016:12)

This definition is a broad one and does not limit itself to particular types of sexual behaviours: for example, it can extend to both online and offline behaviours. Clearly, sexually exploitative behaviour expressed by a child or young person could also fit within this umbrella definition.

The concept of CSE has recently been redefined in England as:

'[A] form of child sexual abuse [which] occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.'

(Department for Education, 2017:5)

The dominant image of CSE to date is of adult men exploiting vulnerable teenage young women. However, the picture relating to CSE offenders is much more mixed.

This definition specifies age limits for the victims but not the perpetrators of CSE, so it is open to young people being responsible for the sexual exploitation of children. In other words, conceptually, HSB could be deemed to be CSE if there is an imbalance of power between the young people involved, and if there is an element of exchange involved in the harmful sexual activities between them.

There remain, however, some complexities when young people are identified for transgressive sexual behaviour. Should this be seen through an HSB or a CSE lens? This is not just about definitional niceties: it has very significant consequences for the services on offer, and potentially life-changing consequences for young people in terms of the labels they acquire as a result of their behaviours.

It is also clear that, given the emergence of CSE as a phenomenon of enormous societal and political concern over the last few years, considerable resourcing has gone into developing responses to it; HSB services have not been afforded the same degree of attention or, indeed, funding. The authors have observed the way in which CSE resources have been used to manage young people whose behaviours fits the framework of HSB. Some practitioners have told us that the only way that they have been able to access a service for a young person who has committed a harmful sexual act has been to refer the behaviour as CSE. In other words, there is a risk of young people being shoehorned into a CSE definition as 'perpetrators' because of the availability of a service or a resource, rather than necessarily because their sexual behaviours fit the definition of CSE. This has a number of potentially damaging and dangerous implications for young people.



Some attempts have been made to clarify the definitional confusion that has arisen. As part of the NSPCC operational framework, Hackett et al (2016) theorise the relationship between HSB and CSE in adolescence as depicted in Figure 1.

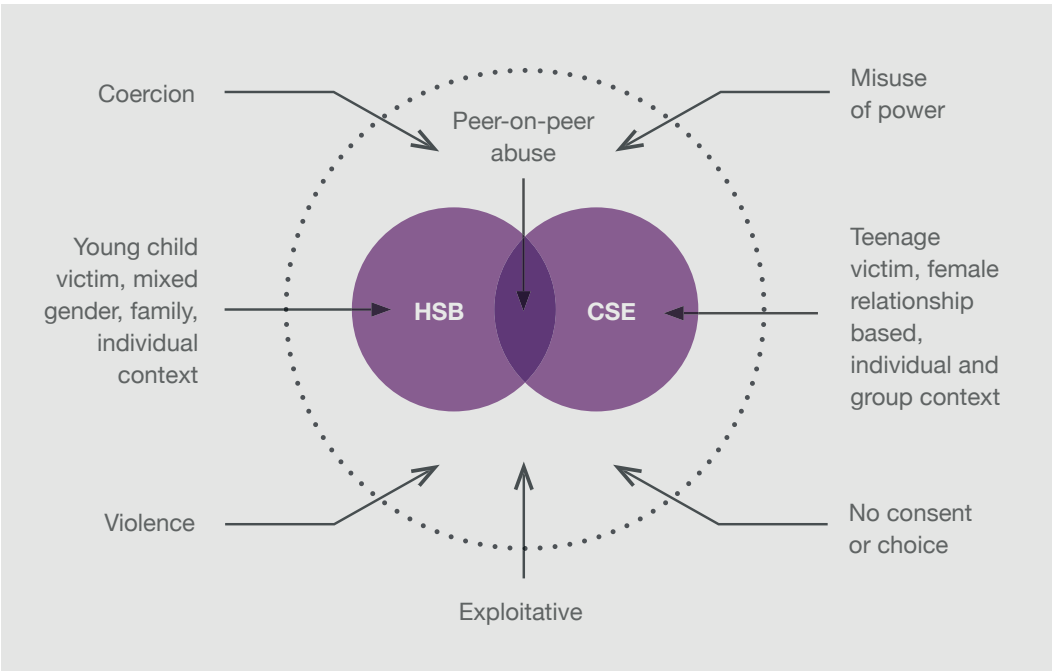
In this model, CSE and HSB are seen as separate yet interlinked phenomena, with some distinct elements but the potential for overlap. CSE is more likely to be represented by sexual violence towards teenagers, often in a relational context, and frequently where young women are sexually exploited by either individuals or group offenders (adults or juveniles). HSB is envisaged as abuse that more often involves young people harming younger pre-pubescent victims of both genders in family or community contexts.

Young people who sexually abuse other young people within the context of relationships, often

There are some definitional and conceptual challenges posed by the existence of young people as ‘CSE offenders’.

described as ‘peer-on-peer’ abuse (Firmin, 2015), fit the definitions of both HSB as sexual behaviour which victimises others and CSE as exploitative, exchange-based abuse. Hackett et al (2016) therefore argue that it is appropriate to view HSB and CSE as distinct but overlapping forms of sexual abuse, as both share the elements of coercion, misuse of power, violence and lack of consent and choice.

**Figure 1: The distinct and interlinked nature of CSE and HSB**



## 2. Method

The CSE team in which data were collected is located in the North East of England. It is a multiagency initiative, funded by the local Police and Crime Commissioner, which focuses on CSE and on missing children. Comprising police officers, a social worker, an intelligence officer and youth workers, it works closely with schools and other agencies involved in safeguarding children, including by monitoring and maintaining intelligence on CSE suspects, and is operational over two local authority areas. The geographical areas it covers include mixed, urban communities with substantial elements of poverty and deprivation; however, they do not represent large, inner-city communities.

The data collected consist of 14 cases known to the team. They represent a convenience and non-probability sample, but represent a significant minority of the cases becoming known to the team over the 24 months prior to the time of data collection (in June 2017) where an alleged perpetrator was under the age of 18 at the point of their harmful or exploitative sexual behaviours.

The data were collected and summarised from electronic police records by the second author, who is employed as data analyst within the CSE team, using a structured data collection schedule designed specifically for the project. All data were anonymised prior to sharing with, and analysis by, the first author. This pilot study therefore draws only on existing secondary data that were already available to the CSE team. In the majority of cases, young people were not aware that they were being monitored by the CSE team. It was therefore not possible to seek permission from the young people in question, or to ask them to contribute in an active way to the study. Extreme care was taken to remove any features that could lead to identification of any young person, their family members or their victims. Permission was gained by Durham Constabulary to use the anonymised data for the purposes of the research, and ethical approval for the study was gained through the Durham University Ethics Committee.

All cases were ‘information rich’, meaning that the electronic records contained considerable and detailed information provided by a wide range of agencies. In all cases, the information on the electronic records had been compiled over a substantial period of time; as police intelligence on young people had developed, so had the amount of information about their offending behaviours. Although the CSE team itself had been in operation for only two years, many of the electronic records contained background information on young people which had been developed over many years. The strength of the data is therefore that they represent real-world cases open to a CSE team, underpinned with historical information about the alleged perpetrators’ earlier life histories.



All cases were ‘information rich’, meaning that the electronic records contained considerable and detailed information provided by a wide range of agencies.



In the time and resources available at this initial stage, it was possible only to identify and analyse existing data on electronic records. It was not possible to undertake interviews with professionals involved in the cases, to confirm or clarify any of the information on the records; nor was it possible to interview the young people and their families directly. The data are therefore limited by the likelihood that official case records are partial and limited: although they represent a good proportion of this one CSE team’s overall recent cases concerning young people about whom there were CSE concerns, they are unlikely to represent the full range of cases being worked with by CSE teams across the country. As a result, the findings reported here should be regarded with caution and as, at best, indicative.

### 3. Findings

Core findings relating to each young person are presented in case study format in Table 1 below. This table includes a summary of any known background experiences, such as of abuse or adversity, which may have served as underpinning precursors or motivating factors for the subsequent harmful or exploitative sexual behaviours. Additionally, any previous non-sexual criminal or deviant histories are described. The concerning sexual behaviours displayed by the young person are summarised in chronological order, to describe the known trajectories of concerning behaviours over time.

It is important to emphasise that, where previous offending behaviours are described, these are presented as they were recorded on the police/CSE team database. So, a reported historical rape or sexual assault records information and intelligence about the known behaviour of an individual, irrespective of whether this behaviour led to prosecution or a particular criminal justice outcome.

In each case, an assessment is made as to whether the known transgressive sexual behaviours fit the definitions of HSB and/or CSE, as offered above.

A tentative assessment is also made of the potential primary pathway(s) into the transgressive sexual behaviour taken by the young person, using the pathways model proposed by Ward and Siegert (2002). The model describes five primary developmental 'pathways' leading into sexually abusive behaviours. It is based on a core set of distinct and interacting dysfunctional psychological mechanisms, which constitute vulnerability factors and are influenced by direct and indirect factors (such as prior life experiences and learning events) as well as biological, cultural and environmental factors. Each of them, Ward and Siegert suggest, depicts a specific offence pathway with different psychological and behavioural profiles, and separate aetiologies and underlying deficits. The five pathways, referred to in Table 1, are summarised as:

- ▶ *Intimacy and social skill deficits*, where significant problems with intimacy result in an individual turning to inappropriate or harmful sexual behaviours in order to ease feelings of loneliness. This pathway can be particularly reflective of young people with underlying problematic attachment relationships leading to difficulties in establishing appropriate intimate relationships through adolescence.
- ▶ *Deviant sexual scripts*, where an individual has distorted beliefs and thought processes that guide their sexual behaviours. This pathway can be particularly reflective of young people who have been inappropriately sexualised as children or have experienced significant sexual trauma and abuse, and who in adolescence have difficulty in determining when sexual contact is appropriate or desirable.
- ▶ *Emotional dysregulation*, where an individual has significant difficulty in managing their emotional states and where abusive sex becomes a dysfunctional way of dealing with anger or negative mood states.
- ▶ *Antisocial thinking*, where an individual's attitudes and beliefs are supportive of generalised criminality, rule breaking and boundary violation across multiple contexts. This pathway can be particularly reflective of young people who have a general antisocial lifestyle in adolescence and little regard for the needs of others, and whose sexually abusive behaviours occur in conjunction with other non-sexual criminality.
- ▶ *Multiple pathways*, where an individual's pathway involves a wide range of factors implicit in the previous pathways, with no single prominent feature among them.

Table 1. Core findings relating to young people about whom there were CSE behaviour concerns<sup>1</sup>

Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP1	None recorded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Theft</li> <li>▶ Burglary</li> <li>▶ Criminal damage</li> <li>▶ Drug and alcohol offences</li> <li>▶ Physical assault</li> <li>▶ General antisocial behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 14: Sexual assault of a 5-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Sexually explicit online chat with a 13-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 20: Associates with two young women aged 16 known to be vulnerable to CSE. Uses the address of a woman with learning difficulties to meet at least one of these young women. Evidence of links to girls under the age of 16.</li> </ul>	Initial HSB leading to CSE-type behaviours in young adulthood.	Antisocial thinking.
YP2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Autism</li> <li>▶ Victim of physical assault aged 15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Criminal damage</li> <li>▶ Public order</li> <li>▶ Alcohol offences</li> <li>▶ Domestic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 16: Rapes a 12-year-old girl in peer group context.</li> <li>▶ Aged 16: Is linked on social media exclusively to girls under 16 and is known to meet with a 13-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 16: Is linked to a 14-year-old girl who is missing from home.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Rapes an 18-year-old woman.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Registered as a sex offender but continues to have communications and relationships with girls aged under 16.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Is reported as being in a relationship with a 15-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Sexual activity with two girls aged 14.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Associates with a vulnerable 15-year-old girl who is missing from home.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Possible relationship with a 15-year-old girl who is in care.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Is linked to a 14-year-old girl, texting, meeting and offering cigarettes and alcohol.</li> </ul>	Extensive HSB and CSE behaviours. Initial HSB becomes generalised CSE.	Deviant sexual scripts. Antisocial thinking.

<sup>1</sup> Offending behaviours are presented as they were recorded on the police/CSE team database. So, a reported historical rape or sexual assault records information and intelligence about the known behaviour of an individual, irrespective of whether this behaviour led to prosecution or a particular criminal justice outcome.

Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP2 (cont.)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 17: Using Facebook under a false name to contact young girls.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Online chat and texts over a one-year period with a 15-year-old girl in care. Subsequently meets girl for sex. Girl reports to foster carer she might be pregnant.</li> </ul>		
YP3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Father is a registered sex offender with an extensive criminal record including extreme sexual violence</li> <li>▶ Care resident</li> <li>▶ When aged 15, was sexually abused by adult female neighbour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Dealing and using cannabis</li> <li>▶ Physical assaults</li> <li>▶ Theft</li> <li>▶ Burglary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 14: Concern about generalised sexualised behaviour. YP3 is adding adult women on Facebook and engaging in sexual conversations with them. He is also putting pressure on girls at school to send him naked images, and has sent such images to another girl via Skype.</li> <li>▶ Aged 15: In care home, video-records a girl in her bedroom. Sends and receives naked images of girls via Facebook.</li> <li>▶ Aged 15: Is reported as being in a relationship with a 15-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 16: Provides alcohol for two 15-year-old girls in return for sex. Alcohol purchased by uncle.</li> <li>▶ Aged 16: Incites sexual activity with a 15-year-old girl online, including exposing genitals on video call.</li> <li>▶ Aged 16: Sexual intercourse with a 13-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 16: Sexualised messaging of 15-year-old girl via Facebook.</li> </ul>	Extensive HSB with some elements of CSE-type 'exchange' behaviours emerging.	Deviant sexual scripts.

Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic violence</li> <li>Lack of boundaries at home</li> <li>ADHD</li> <li>Prolific history as missing from home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burglary</li> <li>Physical assault</li> <li>Criminal damage</li> <li>Arson</li> <li>Theft</li> <li>Public order offences</li> <li>Antisocial behaviour</li> <li>Challenging behaviours at school since aged 8</li> <li>Solvent, alcohol and cannabis use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexualised behaviour in a school context from the age of 7</li> <li>Aged 12: Sexual assault of his 8-year-old sister.</li> <li>Aged 14: Sexual assault of a 13-year-old girl whilst both are resident in a residential home.</li> <li>Aged 15: Communicates online with an adult who offers YP4 money for sex several times a week.</li> <li>Aged 15: Raped an adult woman in conjunction with another male.</li> </ul>	Behaviours fit standard HSB definitions; however, YP4 is also a victim of CSE by an adult.	Antisocial thinking.
YP5 (Brother of YP6)	None recorded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Police called following a 'verbal domestic' incident with mother and brother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 17: Requests a 13-year-old girl to send indecent images via Instagram. Admits to sending images of his penis to a 14-year-old girl he knew through school, later entering a 'relationship' with her including sexual intercourse on two occasions resulting in pregnancy. YP5 maintains this was fully consensual though he knew it was wrong as she was under 16.</li> <li>Aged 17: Develops a 'relationship' with a 15-year-old girl, including exchanging images over social media.</li> <li>Aged 18: Contacts a 14-year-old girl over social media, sending naked images and requesting such images.</li> </ul>	HSB. Heavily weighted to online behaviours, including image exchange.	Intimacy deficits.
YP6 (Brother of YP5)	None recorded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Police called following a 'verbal domestic' incident with mother and brother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 14: Instances of requesting sexual images of girls at school, including a 13-year-old.</li> <li>Aged 14: Sends indecent images of his penis to a 13-year-old girl and a 15-year-old girl over Snapchat.</li> </ul>	HSB. Online.	Intimacy deficits.



Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP7 (Brother of YP8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic violence</li> <li>Paternal alcoholism</li> <li>Adopted aged 5</li> <li>ADHD</li> <li>Poor home conditions; family home frequented by burglars and alcoholics</li> <li>Shown indecent images of bestiality by another young person at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Found carrying knife to school</li> <li>Physical assault of brother</li> <li>Harassment of former partner following relationship break-up</li> <li>Burglary</li> <li>Arson</li> <li>Criminal damage</li> <li>Theft</li> <li>Drug offences</li> <li>Missing from home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 18: Vulnerable CSE victim alleges attempted rape by YP7.</li> <li>Aged 18: Police attend following noise complaints and reports of drunkenness at home address. Seven girls aged 14–15 years old in the house, being supplied with alcohol and intoxicated. Families of girls report their children were wearing other children's underwear on their return home.</li> <li>Aged 19: Grooming charges against YP7 dropped, but a harbouring notice issued in relation to a 14-year-old girl.</li> <li>Aged 20: Reportedly in a sexual relationship with the above 14-year-old girl.</li> </ul>	Primarily CSE behaviours.	Antisocial thinking.
YP8 (Brother of YP7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic violence</li> <li>Paternal alcoholism</li> <li>Adopted aged 4</li> <li>Poor home conditions; family home frequented by burglars and alcoholics</li> <li>Special school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bullying others at school</li> <li>Aggressive behaviour at home</li> <li>Criminal damage</li> <li>Possessing a weapon</li> <li>Assault</li> <li>Missing from home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 12: Pulls down trousers of a 14-year-old girl in a park amongst peer group.</li> <li>Aged 14: Performs oral sex on girls at school. Rumours that he has performed oral sex on boys, though no evidence to confirm this.</li> <li>Aged 16: Relationship with a 14-year-old girl.</li> <li>Aged 17: Issued a harbouring notice in relation to a 14-year-old girl after having initial grooming charges dropped. The girl's ex-partner is YP7, brother of YP8.</li> </ul>	HSB.	Antisocial thinking.



Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Criminal damage</li> <li>Missing from home</li> <li>Antisocial behaviour</li> <li>Drug offences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 16: Witnesses the sexual assault of a 12-year-old girl by his peer. The girl asks YP9 to stop the assault; he replies he can't get the 'beast' off her.</li> <li>Aged 16: Receives indecent images of 9- and 10-year-old girls' genitals, being told by both over social media that they were 15 years old.</li> <li>Aged 16: Sends several messages to a 12-year-old girl asking her to meet up for sex.</li> <li>Aged 16: Inappropriate messages with a 12-year-old girl (YP9 calling her princess, 12-year-old responding by saying she loves YP9).</li> </ul>	HSB.	Emotional dysregulation?
YP10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theft</li> <li>Burglary</li> <li>Public order offences</li> <li>Drug offences</li> <li>Missing from home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 15: Sexual assault of a 29-year-old woman, sexually grabbed by YP10 whilst he was on a bike.</li> <li>Aged 15: Sexual assault of an 18-year-old woman and a 20-year-old woman. As above, sexual touching whilst riding a bike.</li> <li>Aged 15: Sexual assault of 21-year-old woman – follows and chases her, touches her vagina area, exposes penis and masturbates in front of her.</li> <li>Aged 16: Female underwear found under YP10's bed.</li> <li>Aged 16: Inappropriate sexualised comments to a peer-aged girl at school.</li> <li>Aged 16–17: Series of burglaries where YP10 steals female underwear and jewellery.</li> <li>Aged 17: Sexualised comments and behaviour towards female members of staff whilst in a secure unit.</li> <li>Aged 18: Women's tights found under bed at YP10's home</li> <li>Aged 19: Sexual assault of an adult woman. Follows woman on his bike and touches her on breasts.</li> </ul>	HSB.	Antisocial thinking.  Deviant sexual scripts.  Emotional dysregulation?

Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Neglect due to long-standing parental alcohol and drug use</li> <li>▶ Domestic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Missing from home</li> <li>▶ Burglary</li> <li>▶ Theft</li> <li>▶ Arson</li> <li>▶ Criminal damage</li> <li>▶ Antisocial behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 12: Sends indecent images to a 12-year-old girl, incites the girl to video herself masturbating and to send to him, and threatens her if she does not comply.</li> <li>▶ Aged 12: Indications suggest that YP11 has similarly sent indecent images to two other 13-year-old girls.</li> <li>▶ Aged 14: Rape of a 14-year-old girl. Acting with a male peer, YP11 forces girl to perform oral sex on both in a wooded area. Peer boasts of this at school.</li> </ul>	HSB.	Antisocial thinking. Intimacy deficits?
YP12 (Classmate of YP13)	None recorded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Theft</li> <li>▶ Antisocial behaviour</li> <li>▶ Criminal damage</li> <li>▶ Drug offences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 13: Rape of nephew aged 6.</li> <li>▶ Aged 13: Multiple rapes of two 9-year-old nieces.</li> <li>▶ Aged 18: Breach of bail conditions – seen coming out of a building where two 15-year-old girls were present, contrary to bail conditions.</li> <li>▶ Aged 19: violent stranger rape of a 13-year-old girl outside in the community.</li> <li>▶ Aged 19: Known to be associating with a girl who is a CSE victim aged 15.</li> </ul>	HSB, leading to more CSE-type behaviour.	Antisocial thinking. Deviant sexual scripts.
YP13 (Classmate of YP12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Sexual assault by uncle when aged 4 years old</li> <li>▶ Physical assault by mother's partner when aged 9 years old</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Assault</li> <li>▶ Robbery</li> <li>▶ Theft</li> <li>▶ Missing from home</li> <li>▶ Drug and alcohol offences</li> <li>▶ School exclusion after burning a girl's face</li> <li>▶ Threats of violence to mother and siblings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Aged 17: Repeated acts of physical and sexual abuse of a 13-year-old girl.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Violent sexual assault and robbery of a 22-year-old woman stranger in the community. Police believe he is responsible for other sexual and violent offences.</li> <li>▶ Aged 17: Grooms the 14-year-old sister of a friend over a one-year period, forcing her to have sex resulting in the girl's pregnancy.</li> <li>▶ Aged 19: Inappropriate sexual messages with 14-year-old female cousin.</li> <li>▶ Aged 19: Rapes a 16-year-old young woman who is missing from home. The victim discloses YP13 had also raped her 15-year-old friend; YP13 alleges consensual sex and that she told him she was 16.</li> </ul>	Extensive HSB.	Antisocial thinking.

Individual	Background vulnerability factors	Non-sexual criminality	Sexual behaviour concerns	Fit with HSB/ CSE definitions	Primary pathway(s)
YP14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Domestic violence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ School exclusion</li><li>▶ Missing from home</li><li>▶ Burglary</li><li>▶ Criminal damage</li><li>▶ Theft</li><li>▶ Alcohol and drug offences</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Aged 15: Violent rape of an unknown 13-year-old girl in the community.</li><li>▶ Aged 15: Rape of a 16-year-old young woman known to YP14.</li></ul>	HSB.	Antisocial thinking.  Deviant sexual scripts.

### 3.1. Age

All young people in the sample were male and white British, and aged between 14 and 21 years old at the time of data collection; the majority were aged over 16. This is an older sample than many reported in the orthodox HSB literature: for example, Hackett et al (2013) analysed a sample of 700 cases of HSB from across the UK and found that the most common referral age was 15 years old, with a third of all referrals relating to children under the age of 13.

Current age does not, of course, necessarily correspond with the age of onset of the problematic sexual behaviours. The age of the young people at the point when concerning sexual behaviours first emerged ranged between 7 years old and 18 years old, but it is notable that only one case indicated a pattern of pre-adolescent sexual behaviour problems. In the clear majority of cases, the problematic sexual behaviours appear to have emerged in early or mid-adolescence, as shown in Figure 2.

Again, this is a different pattern from that seen in other demographic studies of young people with HSB, which have indicated substantial early-onset trajectories and a peak intensity of sexually abusive behaviours in the mid-teenage years with a decrease towards adulthood (Vizard et al, 2007). Given the small sample size and non-random sampling method used in the current study, it is not possible to



In all cases, there had been police involvement in the lives of the young people prior to, or separate from, the harmful or exploitative sexual behaviours.

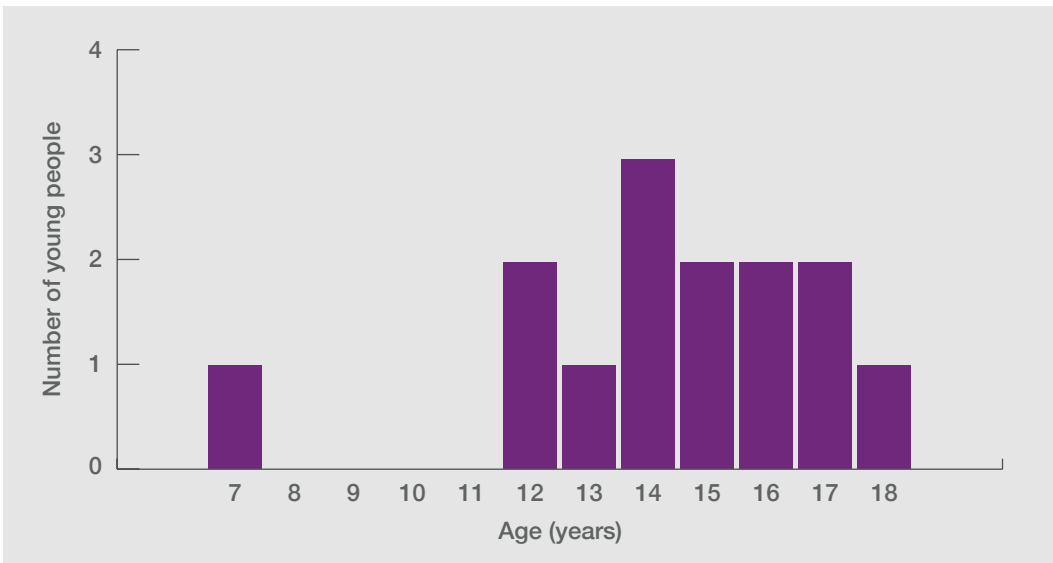


make any definitive conclusions here; however, future research beyond this initial pilot study should investigate whether these differences exist in a larger sample of cases coming to the attention to CSE services.

### 3.2. Developmental histories and vulnerability factors

Data available from the case records contained information about each young person’s developmental histories, and highlighted a range of experiences of adversity which may have made them more vulnerable to perpetrating harmful or exploitative sexual behaviours. It is interesting to note, however, that no vulnerability factors were evident in four of the 14 cases. For the other 10 young people, a number of factors were identified: the most commonly reported was domestic violence (six cases), with physical and sexual abuse and neglect each being evident in two cases. This is a lower rate

Figure 2: Age at known onset of HSB/CSE behaviours



of previous victimisation than reported in other studies: for example, Hackett et al (2013) found either strongly suspected or confirmed sexual abuse in the backgrounds of 50% of their large sample of young people with HSB, with a similar number having experienced physical abuse.

### 3.3. Non-sexual offending histories

It is clear from Table 1 that this was a very deviant and generally antisocial sample. In all cases, there had been police involvement in the lives of the young people prior to, or separate from, the harmful or exploitative sexual behaviours. In two cases, this was as a result of relatively minor domestic disputes, but the remaining 12 young people had long-standing non-sexual offending histories. Theft, burglary, criminal damage and general antisocial behaviours were extensive and pervasive.

Previous research in relation to sub-types of HSB amongst young people has distinguished between ‘specialist’ juvenile sexual abusers (whose offending behaviour appears to be most strongly directed towards younger, pre-pubescent children) and ‘generalist’ offenders (whose sexual offending appears to be more directed towards peers as part of a broader catalogue of deviance and non-sexual offending trajectories). For example, when Pullman and Seto (2012) investigated the distinction between generalist offenders and specialist offenders, they not only found evidence to support the distinction, but also concluded that this reflected likely different developmental trajectories into HSB and different risk trajectories. Generalist offenders, they proposed, are more at risk of other forms of future delinquency, whereas a minority of adolescent sexual offenders are specialists and at risk primarily for further sexual offending. In the current sample, all of the young people appear to fit the ‘generalist’ category.

### 3.4. Developmental pathways into sexual offending behaviour

The notion of distinct pathways into sexual deviance, such as those proposed by Ward and Siegert (2002), is useful in helping to understand the wide-ranging differences between young people coming to the attention of professionals as a result of transgressive sexual behaviours. For some young people, there may be a route from exposure to emotional neglect and early disrupted attachments through the *intimacy deficits* pathway into HSB directed primarily against younger children. For others, there may be a particular route from their prior experience of physical neglect and domestic violence to general aggression and the development of *antisocial thinking* into sexual aggression and violence. For a third group, early sexualisation and sexual abuse may influence their pathways towards *deviant sexual scripts* and HSB towards either children or peers.



It may be that CSE-type behaviours in adolescence, much more so than more general HSB, are more strongly related to general deviance than a history of sexual victimisation.



Each case in the sample was considered against the criteria for the pathways described by Ward and Siegert, with particular regard to the available information about the young person’s background and influences. Given the nature of the data available from existing case records, the primary categorisations assigned are necessarily tentative. As summarised in Table 1, many of the young people appear to fit into the *antisocial thinking* pathway into sexual offending, where an underlying propensity towards general deviance and antisocial behaviour becomes sexualised during puberty. Although the small scale of this study limits the conclusions that can be drawn, this is an

interesting finding which could be investigated in more detail in a larger study. It may be that CSE-type behaviours in adolescence, much more so than more general HSB, are more strongly related to general deviance than a history of sexual victimisation. If this is the case, it could have significant implications for both intervention approaches and prevention activities. Specifically, an approach that targets criminogenic factors associated with general offending behaviour in young people may be particularly appropriate for this group of adolescent perpetrators.

### 3.5. The nature of the HSB/ CSE behaviours

In eight cases, the concerns about young people's sexual behaviours related to a young person offending alone. A further three situations involved pairs of young people whose behaviours appeared interlinked and inter-influenced: two of these involved brothers, and the third involved school classmates. There were no 'gang-related' or larger group incidents of HSB or CSE reported in this sample.

All 14 young people had targeted female victims; only one young person (YP12) was known to have sexually offended against a male, although he also had multiple female victims. Furthermore, all the young people had harmed or offended against peer-aged females, but HSB towards teenage peers was preceded in only three cases by sexual abuse of pre-pubescent children. Three cases in the current sample involved young people sexually offending against adult women as well as against peers. These findings contrast with those of the demographic study by Hackett et al (2013), in which 49% of young people referred because of HSB had at least one male victim, and 75% of cases involved victims aged 10 or below.

As can be seen in Table 1, a range of HSB was demonstrated by all 14 young people. Typically, they were involved in a trajectory of multiple and in some cases escalating harmful sexual behaviours. Nine young people engaged in exploitative or harmful sexual behaviours online or using social media, such as the sharing of indecent images, sexting or online grooming; in all but one of these cases, the online HSB was

accompanied by contact sexual exploitation or sexual abuse. There was not strong evidence of a clear progression from online to offline HSB: it was just as likely for offline HSB to precede online behaviours. It appears that an underlying propensity for deviance and antisocial behaviour meant that many of the young people were highly motivated towards deviant sexual acts across settings in both the online and offline environments.

Does the range of these deviant sexual acts fit best a definition of CSE or HSB? As can be seen in Table 1, it is very difficult to separate these behaviours meaningfully and neatly into these categories. Certainly, all cases fit the broad umbrella definition of HSB as described in section 1.2; in many cases the extent to which they were accompanied by overt elements of exchange, as would fit the definition of CSE, is much less clear. In some cases, it is possible to see a progression from sexually abusive behaviours without overt elements of exchange towards more 'CSE-type' behaviours over time. This is perhaps understandable conceptually: as young people's HSB trajectories develop, it is likely that their modus operandi become more generalised across their social contexts, sometimes moving from their immediate home context to their broader social environments such as their school; at the same time, their types of offending may become more sophisticated, leading to more extensive use of exchange in the grooming and commission of HSB. Again, whilst this is a potentially interesting insight, it is important to test it in a wider and more extensive sample.

It is also interesting to note that, in some cases, there were no elements of exchange apparent at all and the identified behaviours appeared to reflect a standard definition of HSB. These cases were subject to monitoring and intervention from a CSE team even though, effectively, they did not fit a strict definition of CSE. Ultimately, this comes down to service remits as well as resource availability and use. It is clear that, in all the cases in the sample, the young people's sexual behaviours required disruption, management and intervention – but it is less clear whether that should be undertaken by a CSE team or by a team which has a broader HSB remit.

## 4. Conclusion

This small-scale pilot study attempted to explore the presence of young people identified as potential CSE perpetrators, by examining data from one multiagency CSE team. It was possible to identify a sample of young people who had come to the attention of the CSE team and were monitored in the community as a result of their known behaviours. The data collected for this pilot study cannot be seen as representative of either the scale or the nature of adolescent-perpetrated CSE. It is, for example, possible that other types of CSE offending are being perpetrated by children and young people but are not coming to the attention of a team which has a particular focus and an operating model. However, a number of interesting potential findings are apparent in the data collected at this stage, and it would be helpful to investigate these in further research.

HSB has often been seen (and indeed dealt with in child protection and criminal justice systems) as a discrete index offence against a child, possibly with identifiable behavioural antecedents, but 'CSE-type' offences appear to be much harder to pinpoint as discrete offences. In this pilot study they appeared to be more represented by a complex set of behaviours over a long period of time. Indeed, for some young people, harming and sexually exploiting others had clearly become a persistent lifestyle trait by the time they had reached late adolescence. Another interesting tentative finding from the study is that, for some young people, more general HSB against younger children earlier in childhood appeared to become generalised towards more pervasive CSE behaviours in later adolescence against teenaged girls.

Perhaps the study's most striking finding is the high degree of general deviance and non-sexual offending behaviour that accompanied the harmful and exploitative sexual behaviour in all of the 14 cases. This may reflect a particularly strong *antisocial thinking* pathway into CSE-type behaviours. The impression

gained is of a sample of adolescent CSE perpetrators who are a very generally deviant group with disinhibited, chaotic and non-boundaried sexual and non-sexual behaviours. If confirmed through further research, this would have major implications for intervention efforts to prevent, disrupt and treat this type of offending. The high number of cases involving sexting, social media and online HSB is also notable.

Further research with a larger and geographically diverse sample is needed in order to test the tentative findings of this pilot study. However, the difficulty in separating the young people's behaviours meaningfully and neatly into categories of CSE and HSB raises questions about the present inadequacy of using distinct sets of language and concepts (CSE and HSB) and service frameworks to respond to the problem of transgressive sexual behaviour in adolescence.

Perhaps the study's most striking finding is the high degree of general deviance and non-sexual offending behaviour that accompanied the harmful and exploitative sexual behaviour in all of the 14 cases.



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Reports in the child sexual exploitation perpetrators research programme:

1. *Young people who engage in child sexual exploitation behaviours:  
An exploratory study*  
Simon Hackett, Durham University and Stephen Smith,  
Durham Constabulary
2. *Characteristics and motivations of perpetrators of child sexual  
exploitation: A rapid evidence assessment of research*  
Kate Walker, Claire Pillinger and Sarah Brown, Coventry University
3. *Characteristics and perspectives of adults who have sexually exploited  
children: Scoping research*  
Kate Walker, Claire Pillinger and Sarah Brown, Coventry University
4. *Interventions for perpetrators of child sexual exploitation: A scoping study*  
Caroline Drummond and Jessica Southgate, Nacro
5. *Interventions for perpetrators of online child sexual exploitation:  
A scoping review and gap analysis*  
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University of Lincoln; Britta Schumacher, Maastricht University;  
Hannah Bradshaw, University of Lincoln; and Jelena Stevanovic,  
Maastricht University